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25. FROG AND LIZARD IN THE DIETARY OF THE INDIAN ROBIN *SAXICOLOIDES FULICATA* (LINN.)

In the Keoladeo National Park on 15 July 1989, an Indian robin *Saxicoloides fulicata* alighted on the ground *c.* 25 m from me and caught an olive-green-and-white animal from the nearby drying water body. Careful observation through binoculars revealed it to be a small frog. The robin had caught the head end of the prey and battered it repeatedly as is done by a kingfisher. Occasionally the bird screeched as if it found difficulty in tackling the unusual prey. The frog appeared to be dead after eight minutes of struggle and the bird flew off with it to the adjacent old building where it had a nest. After the departure of the adult robin from its nest I checked the nest and could see only three nestlings. The ability of the Indian robin to kill a frog presumably to feed its young was something which was not expected.

A few days later, an Indian robin fed on a hitherto unrecorded food item. An adult robin repeatedly swooped on the wall where the nest was located. Close observation revealed the presence of a house gecko (*Hemidactylus* sp.) at the place where it swooped. At every swoop the robin hit the gecko, perhaps attempting to pull the lizard off the wall. As soon as the gecko fell to the ground, the bird battered the prey and tore its abdomen. The contents were eaten, after which it started devouring the lizard. Ali and Ripley (HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN, 1983) reported insects and their larvae, grasshoppers, ants, termites and hymenopterans as the food of the Indian robin. I could not find any herpetofauna in the dietary of the Indian robin in the available literature.

January 16, 1990 C. SIVASUBRAMANIAN

26. NEST SITE SELECTION BY BAYA *PLOCEUS PHILIPPINUS* (LINN.)

The baya *Ploceus philippinus* is generally a colonial nester. However, during a visit to Sarai village in Satna district of Madhya Pradesh I observed *Acacia arabica* Willd. trees growing in farm bunds in the vicinity of human habitation, bearing single baya nests. Out of 31 nest trees, 27 trees were with a single nest, one with two nests and three trees with four, seven and 19 nests. The minimum distance between the nest trees was 12 m and the maximum distance approximately 2 km. Height of the single nest-bearing trees ranged from 4.2 m to 11 m. As crown width ranged between 3 m to 7 m, the tree crowns were otherwise suitable for colonial nesting.

Construction of a single nest in the trees of any locality by the baya is an interesting phenomenon and hence worth placing on record.

November 2, 1989 DEEP NARAYAN PANDEY

27. BLACKHEADED MUNIA *LONCHURA MALACCA* (LINN.) IN GUJARAT

The blackheaded munia *Lonchura malacca* has been reported from Raipur, Pachmari, Bombay to Kanyakumari (Ali and Ripley 1983); Ali (1954) did not come across the bird in Gujarat. In this decade, however, it has been reported to occur in small numbers and flocks from different parts of the state — in Bhuj, Kutch district by Varu (pers. comm.); in Dabhoi, Baroda district by Monga and Naoroji (1983); in Jasdan, Rajkot district by Shivrajkumar (1985); in Anand, Kheda district by Parasharya and Patel (1985).

All these sightings have been interpreted as of escapees from captivity, though there has been no evidence for or against this view. The biggest flock observed so far constituted 20 birds feeding on sorghum crop (Parasharya and Patel 1985).

Recently near the Pariej reservoir on 13 September 1989, six pairs of the blackheaded munia were seen nesting on *Typha*. This is the first time the munia was seen breeding in Gujarat. The nests were barely visible from outside. We could locate the nesting site only because one bird was seen taking nest material. The nests, made of reeds and grasses in a ball form with an entrance on one side, were constructed halfway up the stem of the plants. All of them were built in a small patch of *Typha* covering an area of about 15 sq. m. Four nests had eggs in them, the number of eggs being 2, 3, 4 and 6. In one other nest, there were three hatchlings and one egg, whereas in still another one there were three 4-5 day old nestlings. Many more pairs might have been breeding there, but we did not have enough time to check the whole area. Soon thereafter, on two occasions in the same month, we observed two pairs, one each on *Typha* at Dethli (Kheda district) and in a sugar-cane field at Kodinar (Amreli district).

It is evident from the data presented that the munia has an almost state wide distribution in small numbers and very much limited to specific localities. Presently, we have information on its breeding only from Pariej, Kheda district, but it presumably breeds in other districts also.

With an increasing number of sightings of the blackheaded munia as well as the present report of a breeding colony, the bird seems to have well established wild populations in many parts of the state and must find a place in the checklist of birds of Gujarat as a resident bird.

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K.L. MATHEW
B.M. PARASHARYA
November 21, 1989 D.N. YADAV

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28. COMMON GARDEN LIZARD *CALOTES VERSICOLOR* PREYING ON BROOK'S GECKO *HEMIDACTYLUS BROOKI*

The food habits of the common garden lizard *Calotes versicolor* (Daudin) have been described by J.C. Daniel (THE BOOK OF INDIAN REPTILES, 1983). According to him it prefers insects but occasionally may feed on small birds, nestlings, frogs and other small animals. S.K. Sharma (*JBNHS 88(2):* 290-291) has recorded this species feeding on its own young ones also.

On 26 April 1991, at about 1200 hrs, I observed an adult common garden lizard on the trunk of an *Albizzia lebbeck* tree in the World Forestry Arboretum, Jaipur, which was swallowing a sub-adult Brook's gecko *Hemidactylus brooki* Gray. The head of the prey was in the mouth of the predator and the helpless gecko was wagging its tail. Its hind legs were also in motion in an effort to escape. Despite all the efforts made by gecko, within eight minutes the process of swallowing was completed.

The common garden lizard and Brook's gecko both live on trunks of trees in the Arboretum. Both are insectivorous and seem to be competitors for food, but the garden lizard is at an advantage as its feeding area is not limited to tree trunks, but also extends to the ground in the vicinity. By preying geckos, the common garden lizards reduces competition and also gets a substantial meal.

May 23, 1989 SATISH KUMAR SHARMA